



Bruce Hirschman, maker of Bruno Corsini pens, at the Portland Pen Show; below—crescent-filler pen, photo by Stephan Miller.

Bruce Hirschman received his first fountain pen, a Parker 75, when he was twenty-one years old. He remembers that he and several of his college friends who also owned Parker 75s banded together in an informal club, and recalls walking all over campus to help one member find her lost 75. “We watched out for each other’s pens,” he says.

Some years later he purchased one of the contemporary Parker Duofolds, and later a Montblanc Agatha Christie. Then, an elderly friend gave him a Parker Vacumatic that had belonged to his late wife. Hirschman had it repaired and enjoyed using it, but he still didn’t know vintage pens were bona fide collectibles until he attended an antiques show in the Bay area. He was looking at a cache of vintage pens when he spotted a man wearing

a button that read: “I buy old fountain pens.” It was John Strother, and he not only introduced Hirschman to some other collectors but also to the concept of collecting—particularly vintage pens.

Hirschman decided to try making pens in 2003 after collecting for about ten years. He spent two years studying machining, practicing and working by trial and error before he made the first pens he thought were acceptable. He has now been making and selling custom made fountain pens for about four years under the name Bruno Corsini, Bruno being his longtime nickname and Corsini his wife’s surname.

He primarily works with hard rubber, acrylics and polyesters with brass components. Hirschman’s pens reflect his admiration for the look of vintage pens from the early twentieth century—even the contem-

porary pens he owns mirror that same aesthetic. But he was not content to achieve only a vintage look—his pens also operate in the same way as their counterparts of yesteryear. He doesn’t use cartridge/converter filling systems at all. Instead, he studies the filling systems of vintage pens, emulates them and even tries to improve upon them.

When he created a pneumatic filling pen, for example, he studied the Chilton pneumatic fillers. “I made a seal of Delrin (an engineering thermoplastic), not something I would normally use. To seal their pens, Chilton used something wrapped in string and then waxed.” When Hirschman made a sleeve-filler, he didn’t want the sleeve to be friction fit, as in the past. Instead, he developed a way to use threads to secure the sleeve. With this innovation,

AS THE PEN TURNS

Bruno Corsini

BY LAURA CHANDLER



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from left—PENguin, photo by Ron Lussier / lenscraft.com; button-filling demo pen; sleeve filler, photo by Stephan Miller. Prices for most Bruno Corsini pens range from \$600 to \$1,000.



the sleeve didn't need to fit quite so tightly, and could move more easily along the barrel, eliminating scuffing. To date, Hirschman has also built pens with button and crescent filling mechanisms. He is now designing his own piston filler with parts he will make himself. In fact, he makes almost all the parts for his pens, though he purchases pressure bars from a Canadian source. When possible, he uses nibs and feeds from vintage pens and hopes to soon begin designing and making his own feeds. They will be made of hard rubber and will look like early feeds, he says.

Hirschman uses no CNC (Computerized Numerical Control) machines: "I really appreciate the machinist aspect of penmaking. What I make, I make by hand." He uses a small Atlas lathe, Cowells mill, drill press, grinder, buffer and a few hand tools. "I volunteer at the California Academy of Sciences in Golden Gate Park at the machine shop there, so if I need to, I have access to some other machines. My shop is a two-car garage with two cars in it, so I have to share it," he says with a chuckle. "But it works."

Hirschman is proficient in mathematics and sees this as a vital prerequi-

site for any machinist. He calculates everything down to the thousandth of an inch, to get the desired amount of taper, to achieve close-fitting, smooth threads and so forth. "I try to make all my pens disassemble-able, so that if something should go wrong eighty years from now, there's a way to take the pen apart without breaking it. I avoid glue, and don't use it where a couple of parts might need to be taken apart. I use threading instead."

Hirschman doesn't have a lot of inventory on hand, because he generally makes bespoke pens. "Through pen shows or word of mouth, I meet people who have seen my work and we work together to make the pen."

Although it is not a full-time pursuit, penmaking is immensely satisfying for Hirschman. "I spent thirty years as a software developer, which meant that everything I made over those years was pretty much intangible and obsolete. I wanted to make something I could be proud of, and something that would outlive me. These pens should last for generations."

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